

Darkroom

The developer whistles up storm clouds
in the corners of the photograph,

picks out herringbone on a jacket sleeve,
ushers in the ever-deepening night,

leaves the paper slick as a newborn's head.
The stop bath resists, ceases, arrests,

prepares for the fixer, that chemical undertaker,
which fastens light and shadow irrevocably to the emulsion.

Death and preservation come into the picture,
as in the phrase The Fix Is In.

Fixer marks clothing, trays, and tongs
with indelible, bruise-colored stains,

but stop bath enters the skin.
If you spill it on your hand

you can taste it instantly
at the back of your throat.

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